

KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

STAFF NOTE

Review Item:

Assistance to schools with high dropout rates

Applicable Statute or Regulation:

KRS 158.145, KRS 158.146, 704 KAR 3:305

History/Background:

At the December 2006 meeting, the Kentucky Board of Education reviewed the 2005 nonacademic data and began an examination of the extent and nature of the dropout problem in Kentucky. The Board decided to consider the dropout problem over the course of multiple meetings because it is a highly complex issue directly related to a broader context of the changes that are needed in Kentucky to bring every student to graduation and successful transition to college and work. The December discussion focused on three perspectives:

1. The scope and nature of the problem in Kentucky and a comparison to the national data;
2. A review of what has been and is being done from the state level to reduce the dropout rate; and,
3. What strategies would be employed in the future?

At the conclusion of that discussion, the Board directed that discussion on dropout prevention be positioned in the context of the overall secondary agenda for increasing graduation rates among all students, as “Persistence to Graduation for All,” and asked the Department to examine national research that might inform Kentucky’s theory of action.

In February 2007, the Board heard presentations from local districts about challenges and opportunities in supporting all students to graduation. The Board also received an overview of national research. As the Department analyzed both the local presentations and the findings in the national research, common themes emerged and the Department presented a six-strategy framework to increase persistence to graduation.

Promoting Power Studies

In October 2007, the Center for the Social Organization of Schools (CSOS), Johns Hopkins University, released an update to a 2004 study on the dropout crisis in the nation. The 2004 report introduced the concept of “promoting power” as an additional criterion to consider along with indicators such as dropout rate and graduation rate when looking at how schools are or are not moving students successfully through the education pipeline to high school graduation.

According to the CSOS, “Promoting Power compares the number of seniors enrolled in a high school to the number of freshmen four years earlier (or three years earlier in a 10-12 high

school). It is currently the best available estimate of school-level graduation rates that can be used to compare high schools within and across states. . Promoting power is also a good indicator of high school's that have both high and low graduation rates. It is very likely that high schools which have 60% or fewer seniors than freshmen four years earlier will have unacceptably low graduation rates by state and national standards.” It was in 2004, that schools with a promoting power of 60% or less began to be classified as “dropout factories” in the national press.

Data released in the 2004 report were based on three-year averages for the classes of 2000, 2001 and 2002. At that time, Kentucky had 43 high schools with a promoting power of 60% or less. Those schools represented 19% of the total number of schools, 34,465 students, 19% of students and 35% of minority students.

The 2004 study was updated in 2007. Those results were released in October 2007 and were covered in both national and local press. The 2007 data is based on three-year averages for the classes of 2004, 2005 and 2006. Key findings of the Kentucky data are:

- The number of schools with a promoting power of 60% or less is 28, as compared to 43 in 2004.
- Of the 28 high schools on the 2007 list, 21 were on the 2004 list.
- The 28 high schools constitute 12.6% of all high schools in the state, as compared to 19% in 2004. (Compares to 11.9% nationally.)
- The percentage of estimated dropouts who attended these schools is 22.3%. (Compares to 48.4% nationally.)
- The percentage of estimated African-American dropouts who attended these schools is 42.1%. (Compares to 68.5% nationally.)
- The percentage of estimated Hispanic dropouts is 25.8%. (Compares to 63.2% nationally.)
- The percentage of estimated white dropouts is 19%. (Compares to 30% nationally.)
- The average freshman graduation rate for 2003- 04 based on promoting power is 73.0. (Compares to 75.0 nationally.)

Appendix A presents a list of schools with weak promoting power, or those with a promoting power of less than 60%, along with additional data pulled from Kentucky sources. It is interesting to note that only four of these high schools are currently in assistance, although some were in assistance in previous years.

As part of the Refocusing Secondary Education for Student Success initiative, the Department has been examining this promoting power data in the context of other data to identify what should be done to support these schools and to improve outcomes for students. As we approach the question of how to provide effective technical assistance to districts with higher dropout rates and lower promoting power, the Department has committed to addressing this work as a cross-agency initiative through closer collaboration with a variety of external and community partners. Our expectation is that a common understanding of the problem at the state, regional and local levels and a better understanding of the national conversation and related research will enhance policy making and increase chances for success. Also, policies, strategies and action plans supporting at-risk youth and the schools

that they attend must be considered in the broader context of district and school improvement.

Three themes continue to emerge as we listen to the more successful districts and look at national research on keeping youth in school and supporting them to graduation. We believe that all are necessary, but none are sufficient on their own:

- Using a series of data indicators to identify students who are not on track and unlikely to graduate, beginning no later than the transition into middle school
- Providing a strong advising and student support system based on individual learning plans, that includes a systemic approach to early and effective interventions and strategies that prepare teachers to respond with appropriate interventions
- Creating and sustaining new models and alternative pathways for earning credits and for recovering credits (for in-school youth and for out-of-school youth who are willing to return to education if provided with options), focusing on and leveraging partnerships with parents and the broader community.

Policy Issues:

In addition to the strategies KDE is already implementing, what additional suggestions does the Kentucky Board of Education have for staff on how to respond to the needs of schools with weak promoting power?

Impact on Getting to Proficiency:

If it is true that a student's right to public education in Kentucky is limited to the district in which he/she resides, it is appropriate to hold districts and schools more accountable for engaging in proactive practice, using deliberate systems of individualized supports, and for exploiting state and local partnerships to provide a portfolio of options for achieving graduation.

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